

Walk This Way

For those of us lucky enough to live in Duxbury year round, there is no better treat than walking the big beach at low tide on a bright September morning – the sky is, well, sky blue, and the sand shimmers in the sun arcing closer to the earth.

Perhaps best of all, the four-wheel-drives have mostly migrated.

In the summer, I give up long walks to high pines on the flat sand, having tried it before. The first time, expecting to impress a friend from out of town, we set off at high tide. This was a big mistake, for we walked directly into the little living rooms that spill out the back of the trucks and SUVs into the sand. We had to thread our way through the radios, beach chairs and Wranglers, and we soon turned around.

Guest Editorial

Another time, I went out early in the morning, which, I discovered, is exactly when the most serious beach lovers go, too. Instead of wallowing in a reverie with only the waves to distract me, I encountered car after car after car.

I know I sound like a summer grinch, but I don't like to see the beach turn into a parking lot. It seems just plain unnatural to me. In this, I know I'm in the minority, and I realize that people who recycle, feed the birds, and plant beach grass every year are also delighted to drive onto the beach on a summer night for a picnic.

I understand that carrying three kids, 14 sand toys and a day's worth of food, towels and chairs is easier when you open the back hatch instead of schlepping across the dune path. I grasp the economy of selling over a million dollars' worth of stickers in a time when every penny is being counted twice. And I know the people who take responsibility for access to the beach take it seriously, and this is one reason the beach is so popular.

Finally, I realize I don't own the beach. I just wish I didn't have to share it with General Motors.

So I tend to walk in my neighborhood in the summer, sometimes along paths handed down from the Pilgrims and the Native Americans before them. I like the circuit along Standish Shore, passing the lilacs Elder Brewster brought from Holland and cutting through the woods just before the Myles Standish home site. No matter how hot the day, it's cool in the woods that lead over to Goose Point Lane, and I always wonder what feet trod before mine centuries ago. That's a particular pleasure you don't get walking on pavement.

Sometimes I'll walk the sand ringing the Standish Shore peninsula. I'll go past the old springs near Myles' home and the hotel from the 19th century. Then I'll come up and walk the little 1871 road that winds along a collection of Victorian cottages overlooking the bay.

In early summer, this dirt avenue was grassed in, and so the lawns now spill uninterrupted to the beach. Only a hydrant and pipes beneath remind us of the road beneath.

I don't miss the cars there. Now perhaps it's just the habitual, two-footed constitutional-takers, dog-walkers, baby-soothers and joggers who feel it underfoot, as they have for 130 years.

The four-wheel-drives have their own beach, after all.